

→ **MUSIC AND MEDICINE** have long been entwined, even noted as early as 350 B.C. in Aristotle's scientific treatise *De Anima*, as Greek physicians of the day believed that musical vibration had the power to heal. From Benedictine abbess, composer, polymath, and biologist Hildegard von Bingen to bassoonist Dr. Thomas Südhof, winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Medicine for his work in cell transport, the link between the two fields is compelling. While there is limited research to substantiate the evidence of musical talent as a clear indicator of success in medicine, an inordinate number of doctors and mental health professionals studied music long before they entered medical school.

Many Curtis alumni continue to perform on the world's greatest stages, but some have pursued other career paths, among them, anesthesiology, cardiology, dermatology, radiology, and nursing. They can be found at healthcare facilities throughout the U.S. and elsewhere.

Dexterity, self-discipline, stamina, and technical mastery are all necessary aspects of playing an instrument or singing proficiently, and the same can be said for doctors, who must maintain their composure as they work alongside colleagues in highly stressful environments, not unlike artists performing within ensembles in front of live audiences. Two Curtis alumni, Dr. Korey Marshall (Oboe '10) and Dr. Heide Rice (Piano '72), shared their thoughts about how their studies at Curtis served as a predictor of future success.

Dr. Marshall, an anesthesiology resident at Philadelphia's Thomas



Alumni Highlight

Finding Harmony in Medical Careers

Curtis alumni share skills that transfer from concert stage to operating theater.

BY RYAN LATHAN

Jefferson University Hospital, who earned a doctorate in medicine from the University of Virginia in 2019 and degrees from Carnegie Mellon in biological sciences in 2013 and biomedical engineering in 2014, started playing the clarinet in sixth grade and transitioned to the oboe the following year. He later successfully auditioned for Atlanta Symphony's Talent Development Program, which encourages diversity in classical music and provides free lessons with

an Atlanta Symphony Orchestra member instructor. There he studied with oboist Barbara Cook, who had subbed with the orchestra for many years. Towards the end of high school, she encouraged him to apply at Curtis, and from 2007 to 2010, he attended the school as a student of Richard Woodhams ('68).

"Just being inside those walls with some of the other student musicians opened your mind to the possibilities. I learned early on, probably my first

Above: Korey Marshall
Right: Heide Rice with Fritz, Stephanie Yen-Mun Liem Azar

year, that you didn't practice until you got it right; you practiced until you couldn't get it wrong," says Dr. Marshall, who ultimately decided he wanted to pursue another path. "It has a way of consuming your whole being, and that's the price of pursuing a dream, especially if you want to be great at it. That discipline, that sort of almost obsessive, relentless pursuit of whatever your ideal is in your field, is applicable—the idea



that against the odds, in the face of whatever was going on, you had to find a way to perform.

"It's a mindset that if you miss, you're among the stars, even if you don't get to the moon. That parallels medicine because the stakes are often very high. Everything is in service of the patient."

Dr. Rice played the piano in public for the first time at age six on local television and appeared with the New Orleans Symphony when she was nine. As a child and teenager, she gave recitals and was primed for a career as a soloist. She entered Curtis in 1968, studying first with Eleanor Sokoloff ('38), then with Seymour Lipkin ('47) and Rudolf Serkin, as well as with theory teacher Robert Levin, who guided her through those years of personal growth.

"Towards the end of my time at Curtis, I finally became a little more independent personally and then began to think of the direction of my life," says Dr. Rice. "That's when the thought of medicine came up. Both my grandfathers were physicians. However, I was encouraged to continue and get a master's in performance [at the Manhattan School of Music]." She finished her studies and then went to the University of Alabama, where she became a board-certified anesthesiologist, and retired five years ago to be a German translator.

"When an anesthesiologist and a surgeon work together, it's kind of like playing chamber music. You anticipate each other's moves, you anticipate the difficulties, and you watch each other. Intense musical training gives you focus, and it gives you discipline. You can't get anywhere in the sciences without those."

Another inspiring alumna continued to perform as an organist and choral singer, even while she was training to become a specialized heart surgeon at the Columbia

College of Physicians and Surgeons. Stephanie Yen-Mun Liem Azar (Organ '08) was born with a congenital heart defect, but she didn't let that hinder her ambitions. She mastered the violin and piano at a young age and began taking organ lessons at nine. When she turned 15, she was admitted to Curtis where she studied with Alan Morrison. After her first year at the school, she suffered a stroke in her sleep and was diagnosed with a neurological disorder that caused tremors.

In 2006, a pioneering procedure involving the surgical implantation of an electrical stimulator in her brain changed her trajectory. She became an advocate for people with movement disorders and was invited to speak at the first national conference. Moved by everything she learned, the 20-year-old took pre-med science courses at Harvard University and entered medical school at Columbia, where she encountered another musician turned doctor who took her under his wing.

"Stephanie mentioned that there was always this incredible response as soon as you mentioned Curtis," said her mother, longtime Curtis trustee Lisa Liem. "She was in line at the John Hopkins cafeteria one time and started chatting with this person in front of her. It turned out to be a very well-known heart surgeon. He invited her to come into his operating room, and it turned out that he was a piano graduate from Peabody before he became a doctor. Curtis opens a lot of doors. I think people who graduate from this school and are not performing for a living—it's still in them and they always keep it with them."

This article is dedicated to the life and memory of Stephanie Yen-Mun Liem Azar, who passed away after a bout with pneumonia on July 19, 2013.